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Kaleidoscopes: Women juggling the fragments

Not long ago I had several working compartments in my life, all of which could have taken on full-time status if I had allowed them to. I was finishing a master of divinity degree. I was director of MCC U.S. Women's Concerns. I was a mother of two children under three. Several other roles occupied my emotional energy—spouse, friend and pastoral team member.

A good friend offered me both wise counsel and an image that has helped me hold my fragmented life together. She offered me the image of a kaleidoscope. The pieces of my life, she said, may seem like unrelated fragments, like the colorful chips of glass in a kaleidoscope. But if I reflected on the fragments, a beautiful pattern might emerge from the relationships among the pieces.

It is the mirrors in the kaleidoscope, she said, that create the beauty. Without them we see only broken shards of colored glass. But through reflection, shifting patterns emerge.

That image of a kaleidoscope has sustained me many times. As I take time to reflect on the interactions among various pieces of my life, patterns do emerge. What does my work on women's issues say to my seminary class on Christology? What does Women's Concerns say about parenting a two-year-old daughter? How are gender issues playing out on our pastoral team, in my marriage and with my friends?

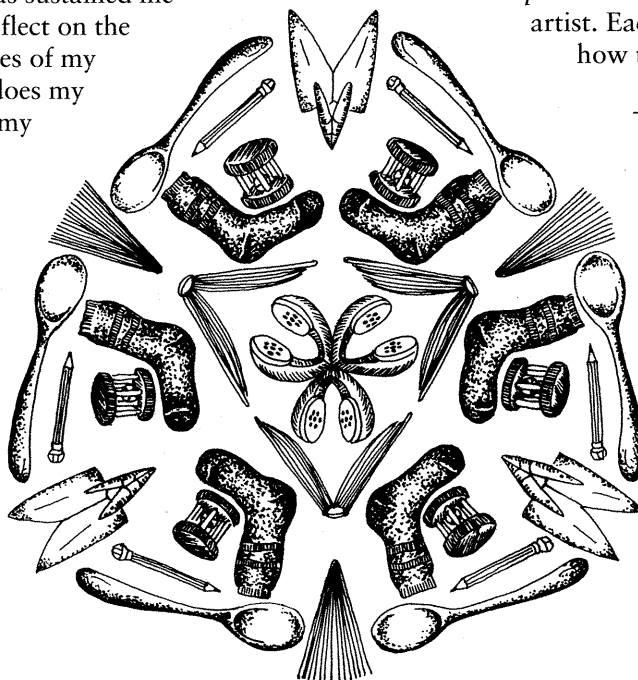
The essential component in this kaleidoscope is the mirrors or the time to reflect. When I'm busy, it's easy to neglect time for reflection. Sometimes I even wonder if I fill my life so full because I want to avoid the emptiness I fear I might find when I do reflect on the pieces of my life. But if I face the emptiness by reflecting in stillness and silence, that concentrated reflecting can lead to a God's-eye perspective on the pattern. Seeing the overall pattern is far more helpful than adding one more chip of colorful glass. Without the reflection time, the many fragments remain unorganized clutter.

Lately I've been decreasing compartments. I am still a mother, spouse and friend. I've finished my degree, and I've left my position at Women's Concerns to become a pastor. Decreasing the number of pieces has not decreased the need for reflection. It has simply changed the patterns.

This issue of *Report* focuses on how women hold together the many and varied pieces of their lives. I suspect most women live busy lives with diverse compartments, but some of the busiest women I know are the women involved with Women's Concerns. For that reason, this issue includes articles from members of the U.S. and Canadian Committees on Women's Concerns, the director of the MCC communications department, the new director of Women's Concerns and the new editor of *Report*. There's also a poem by our *Report* artist. Each offers her own reflection on how to balance a busy life.

—Gwen Groff, compiler

Gwen was director of MCC U.S. Women's Concerns from 1996–99. She is pastor of Bethany Mennonite Church in Bridgewater Corners, Vt.



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by Charmayne Brubaker

Juggling: An art, not a science

I occasionally introduce myself as a juggler in MCC's communications department rather than as the head of the department.

I see this as a fit description of my work. Many of my tasks are not continuously in my hands, but rather move rapidly on and off my desk to others, sometimes coming back again. Most of the people with whom our department works have intermittent contact with us. They need a brochure or video, then we part ways until the next project. Those I supervise count on me to be at my desk when they need me, but out of their hair while they do most of their work.

Over the years, I have practiced being a juggler of tasks. At work, I have a monthly calendar, a weekly to-do list and a daily folder.

When I have too many tasks, I pick those that are essential and say no to the rest. Often I discover that others can do the task as well or better. Still, I sometimes falter when I view unanswered letters, unread email messages and undone tasks as a staff person waits in line for my time.

In the past, I also kept lists at home. One evening 15 years ago during my 12-week maternity leave after our first son's birth, I was sitting with my list-for-the-day, discouraged because I had not been able to cross off any tasks. That night and for several weeks, I went to bed discouraged. Then, to my joy, I realized that my lists had been inaccurate. They did not include "nurse Alex, do Alex's laundry, rock Alex, play with Alex, change Alex's diapers."



Eventually, I stopped using lists at home. I remember finding a list on the counter when I got home from work one day. "I have lists at work. I don't want lists at home," I snapped.

I was ready to try out the new juggling lesson I had learned from the instructor of a course for first-time supervisors. If your lives at home are too full, she said, try tackling your home tasks in the way children play. Rather than driving yourself to focus on each task completely before moving on, scatter your tasks in different places. Float from one to another—the way children move from building blocks to books to clay to Candyland and back again. I tried that and it works.

Now our calendar is our only list. We check it daily to see who needs to be where and when.

We're transportation jugglers, but not so good at it that we want to be air traffic controllers. Keeping track of four people's schedules is enough for me.

Juggling tasks and schedules is easier for me, though, than some of the other juggling I need to do. It's tougher for me to juggle roles: employee, mother, wife, sister, friend, in-law, neighbor, board member, volunteer, teacher.

The work-family conflicts started, obviously, when our two sons were born and I was working full time. When they were young, I felt obligated to prove, as the second employee in my organization to take a maternity leave, that I could be both a full-time employee and a mother. I remember doing whatever extra I was asked to do at work so no one could cite me as proof that mothers could not pull their fair share of the load. Looking back, I see that I overcompensated in favor of the employee role.

"My brother's death was a major wake-up call to me. I immediately reduced the number of hours I invested in work and started doing more things with family and friends and for myself."

Now, the boys are older and suddenly I find myself wanting to compensate in the opposite direction. A biological clock is ticking, and it dawned on me that I have only five more years to enjoy them before they head out on their own. These days I more often pick baseball tournaments over weekend meetings in rooms without windows.

Management textbooks often talk about role overload that occurs when expectations exceed a person's capabilities. "A person trying to work extra hard at his job, run for election to the school board, serve on a committee at church, coach Little League baseball, maintain an active exercise program and be a contributing member to the family will probably encounter role overload," one author understates. That has not been my tendency; maybe because I find it easier to say no or because I need time alone to survive and to think in paragraphs rather than in sentence fragments.

Perhaps surprisingly, some of the worst times of my life have been when I've been juggling too few roles. Before my first year of teaching, I received my first professional juggling instructions. The principal advised a group of new teachers, "You'll be better teachers if you play some evenings and weekends." Add another role to your life—be a fun-lover, a player—and you'll be a better teacher. A bit of a paradox—but it worked.

Another major lesson in juggling priorities came to me in 1994. My younger brother died unexpectedly. He was a great person for delayed gratification: "When I get out of residency, I'll have picnics, get married, have fun and have children," he'd promise his family and himself. But he never had a chance to live that more balanced life he dreamed of. His death was a major wake-up call to me. I immediately reduced the number of hours I invested in work and started doing more things with family and friends and for myself. I started walking every day, and I added the role of student to my juggling act.

I decided to work at getting a master's degree—an MBA—a goal I'd had since 1981. It was a new, exhilarating step. The stimulation, new ideas, new colleagues and new environment improved exponentially my outlook, my performance on the job, my feelings about being a mother and a wife.

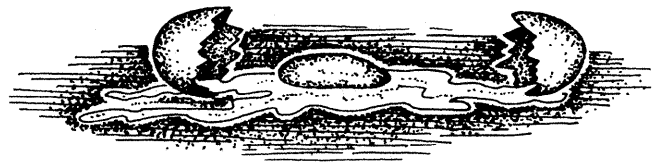
Juggling is good. The trick is finding the right number of tasks, schedules and roles.

Last week, I was stressed emotionally. I was editing several sorrow-filled articles about sexual improprieties. I was also in contact with a church leader and distant relative who had crossed sexual boundaries. All of the lists, all of the calendars in the world could not keep me on track. The emotional swirl in my brain had slowed down the juggling and smothered the joy. I couldn't work well. I fretted over simple decisions. I was anxious about my sons and how they would turn out.

Then I found a column in *Communications Briefings* encouraging people, when stressed, to juggle the hemispheres of their brains. When people feel time-stressed and overburdened, the left side of the brain is stressed, explained author Jane Cole-Hamilton. To reduce stress, switch to the right side by singing or playing a sport, she suggested. When feeling emotionally distressed, the stress is in the right brain, she continued. To reduce that stress, she advised, switch to the matter-of-fact left hemisphere by doing math, writing factual prose or organizing. So I made a list of things I could do in response to the wrongs I was raging about. My brain calmed down and I was able to write this article.

Juggling isn't easy, and I'm not always successful. Some eggs splatter on the floor. Some roles are quite underdeveloped. If you see me tilting my head from side to side, it's likely because I'm juggling hemispheres.

Charmayne is director of MCC's communications department. She earned her MBA from Penn State Great Valley in 1998.



"Limits meant giving up some
ambitions for my children.
One more idol toppled."

by Donna Stewart

Shedding idols

When I married in the fifties, I expected to stay home with our children for the rest of my natural life. How, I wondered, would I maintain an intellectual life while alone with small children (five born in eight years) all day? Fortunately, my husband enjoys talking about ideas, but at first the days were long and lonely.

We lived in the country with no private telephone line and no car at home during the day. I kept my mind alive by listening to public radio and by reading. Trouble was, I concentrated too well on those things and not enough on the child spreading the earth from the plants onto the landlord's hand-woven rug. So I developed an outside interest each year—a French conversation group, a study of the education of gifted children, a stretch as president of the local University Women's Club. Since those activities were in the evening, they did not compete with the children's need for my attention.

I used to envy the East Indian goddess with all the arms. I thought I needed at least six to cope with the baby, the toddler, the meal preparation, the phone, the laundry and various community and church commitments.

God didn't give me extra arms, but gradually over the years, I learned to discard idols and their required obedience. I had never aspired to a face and body beautiful, so I didn't have to spend time on manicures and hairdos. I had, however, been taught to identify my self-worth with a shining home. My mother-in-law had a saving concept—top dusting, she called it—but really she was teaching me self-care. My mother, on the other hand, would have considered such shortcuts self-indulgence. Endurance and self-sacrifice were the idols I inherited from her. Eventually both had to be discarded in the interest of soul health. *You don't need to keep a magazine house. Not everything has to be done perfectly.*

As I began casting off idols for the sake of sanity, I learned to prioritize. *The children come first.* There were unexpected rewards in this. Once a friend

dropped in to find the coffee table on its side with string wrapped over to the piano bench and back again.

"What's this?" she asked.

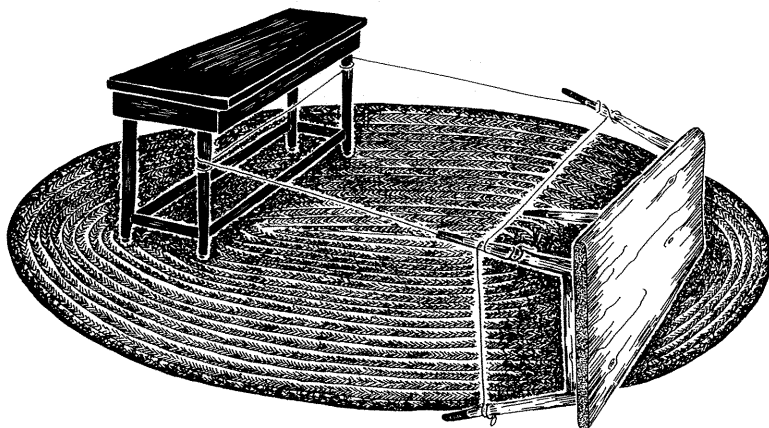
"Oh, I don't know. The kids were making a fort, I think."

Then came the words every mother longs to hear, "Donna, you are the best mother I know."

My belief that the children came first threatened to become an idol itself when music lessons and other activities required me to become a full-time chauffeur. By then, fortunately, I had cast off "suffer and endure" and had moved into my in-laws' problem-solving mode. *What can we do about that, I wonder?* The obvious answer was to live some place where the children could take public transit at least some of the time. The subsequent move to a big, old house in downtown Winnipeg heaped up other bonuses—less peer pressure to consume, fewer sibling conflicts in the larger space, friends from different cultures, opportunities to compare different value systems.

My husband, Gordon, could walk to work. Eventually the children walked with him, dropping off at the university on the way. *Maybe God approves of self-care? Maybe suburban life isn't the only God-approved lifestyle?*

My learning wasn't a simple, upward learning curve. At one point, my "duty first" idolatry led me into a terrible trough. A Christian mentor took me to task for resenting Gord's absenteeism. As she told me how to pray for God to free me from self-pity, I was speechless with tears. I had prayed that prayer hundreds of times. Her well-meant rebuke bore fruit, though. I changed my prayer. *Okay*





"I used to envy the East Indian goddess with all the arms. I thought I needed at least six to cope with the baby, the toddler, the meal preparation, the phone, the laundry and various community and church commitments."

After our son had been away at college for a semester, he made a speech, "Mom, I want to thank you for teaching me how to look after myself. There were guys there that didn't even know how to wash their socks, let alone make a meal."

Managing a sane household required imposing limits on everyone's outside activities. *In addition to your music lessons, you can take one other thing, but no more. You can take swimming OR gymnastics. You can take one this term and one the next, but not both at one time.* Limits meant giving up some ambitions for my children. One more idol toppled.

Lord, how come you answered Ann's prayer and not mine? It was one of the few times when I almost heard a voice. Because you are not Ann, and Gord is not Stan.

But now I had divine permission to confront Gord about his endless outside activities. *There are some things you can say no to! We deserve some of your time too.* With courage to confront came a new equation—frustration + prayer + conflict = two more hands, some of the time at least!

Long before this, I began adding other hands to the two I had available for household tasks. I learned how to organize the first toddler as soon as the second baby was born: *Ruthie dear, would you please bring Mommy a diaper for the baby?* And probably that set a coping pattern. *When overburdened, find helping hands.*

When the girls wanted an Easy Bake oven, I bought muffin and cake mixes and taught them to make real food. For awhile after I went back to my profession and when I was trying not to sacrifice church or community service, the extra hands included paid household help once a week. *She needs the money, and I need the help.* The children learned to make their own beds, pick up their toys and put dirty clothes in the laundry basket.

I gave up some of my own ambitions as well. I taught half-time rather than full-time and spread my graduate work over three years. I limited outside activities—one church and one community commitment. If I added something, I had to get rid of something else. I suppose I was learning to prioritize, but I didn't think of it that way. I thought of it as staying sane. I still didn't seem to have enough hands, let alone an extra brain!

I am not a person who sets goals and priorities, but when Gord became an InterVarsity staff member responsible for a camp, I rejected the idol of an important camp role for myself. I took on smaller tasks. So each summer I had time for reflection on our family life, and I made an annual list of things I wanted to change or improve. One year I lost the list in the back-to-school flurry only to find it in a suitcase the next June as we packed for camp again. To my surprise, we had implemented most of the "improvements" even without the benefit of the list.

Later, when I had occasion to ponder how it was that Catholic sisters involved in care ministries didn't burn out the way others did, I saw the benefit of regular retreats—time for reflection and renewal. I thanked God for building those times into my life quite without my help.

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"Perhaps learning to prioritize, to say no, to delegate, to set boundaries is really only self-help jargon for 'learning righteousness.'"

Because Gord was often busy when I was free and vice versa, holidays were not part of our pattern. We did learn to grab little breaks. One Friday evening when, to our amazement, Gord didn't have a meeting, we took everyone to the "family night" at the pool. The next week I heard one of our daughters bragging to a neighbor that we went "every time my dad has a free Friday." That was a message that family relationships needed more care. We consciously tried to free up more Friday evenings. Before long our church and work communities supported us, saying things like, "Let's not meet on Friday. That's the Stewarts' Family Night." I like to think the children got a message: *You are as important to your father as the campers, the counselors, the sponsors, the church people.* God wasn't giving me extra arms and hands, but sharper ears and eyes to see and hear the needs of my loved ones.

Now our household is smaller, but collisions still occur. The other day a church commitment, a family responsibility and a paid work task conflicted. To my surprise, I was able to sort out the mess without difficulty. *Eureka, I finally have a clear set of priorities: family, church, and THEN paid work. I don't need extra hands after all.*

Perhaps learning to prioritize, to say no, to delegate, to set boundaries is really only self-help jargon for "learning righteousness." As my daughter, who is a pastor, said in a recent sermon, "Righteousness is giving each relationship its due."

Donna is a member of Killarney Park Mennonite Brethren Church in Vancouver, B.C. She occasionally writes for *Sophia*, a Mennonite women's quarterly, but her paid work includes facilitating workshops on abuse of seniors. Donna chairs the BC Women's Concerns Committee.

by Teresa Pankratz

Perhaps it's something like waitressing . . .

In those days
(when she was finding herself
and had time to
write poetry
and
play music)
she discovered
there was an art
to making everything come out
right.

- Table 2: just came in
- Table 4: food is up
- Table 3: putting down menus
and ready to order.

Twenty some years later:
she practices the
art of multiple tasks
daily
(as do most of
the women
she knows).
—Fold laundry:
while planning when to do
the last minute drawings
—Organize the school meeting:
while making pesto
—Worry about traveling alone
in a non-English speaking country
with her 8 year old:
while (she should be) sleeping

Some say:
she never
drops the ball
or
misses a beat

But she knew she had.

For some moments
can only hold
one
thing

And she was just happy
she had been at the pool last week
when her son
turned into
a fish.



"I am learning more and more that Sabbath is a required, sacred rhythm of life. Just as God bids us work, God also commands us to observe Sabbath."

by Regina Shands Stoltzfus

Roles rooted in love

This morning's newspaper had a feature article about upcoming weekend getaways for busy women. Trouble is, none of the dates worked for me.

When asked the question "What do you do?" I mostly answer, "I am a pastor." I figure this is the answer folks are looking for. What do I do that I get paid for? What occupies most of my time? What is most important to me? Giving a more complete, accurate answer would take a lot more time and much more explaining.

I am a mother to four children, a marriage partner to Art, a pastor, a seminary student, and the co-coordinator of an anti-racism program that works with church institutions. I also serve on several church-related boards and do some writing. At times, my life seems out of control.

Most of the time, though, it feels full and busy: in a good way. All of my roles are rooted in my love for God, for God's people and for the church. I think, I hope, that I am being faithful. Even so, every now and then I recognize I can't do everything, and God doesn't even expect me to.

Learning to manage all my roles is a constant challenge. For one thing, it means making some difficult decisions. More often than I like, I find myself needing or wanting to be in more than one place at a time. Not long ago, a friend invited me to a "women's night out"—just a meal and good company, one evening a month. I quickly agreed to meet with the group the next Thursday night.

A few days later I sat with my youth group, planning our last get-together for the summer. They wanted to cook and eat a meal together. With our various jobs, family obligations and the start of school, we had a very small window of opportunity. There was no date that worked for everyone—except Thursday. I met with the youth group and had a wonderful time, but I disappointed my friend.

Because my anti-racism work involves travel away from home, it is one of my most time-consuming activities. The work is crucial and very dear to my heart, so I am more



likely to sacrifice other parts of my life for this work. I need to be very careful and keep well-maintained boundaries around my commitments. Two such boundaries are: 1) No more than one training or meeting that requires travel away from home per month; 2) An agreement with my partner in the work to hold each other accountable for keeping our families first.

Because the anti-racism work involves challenging our church institutions to have more people of color involved and active, I am often asked to be involved in the work of these groups. I am learning to say no.

My house is not the tidiest one on the block, and we do not entertain very often. I struggled for years with this one, especially after marrying into a family where many of the women are gifted at making attractive, comfortable, welcoming homes. Over the years, we worked out a plan that works for our family. We eat simple meals; my husband and sons do all the laundry; and we have a high clutter tolerance.

Sometimes, though, I just have to stop. I am learning more and more that Sabbath is a required, sacred rhythm of life. Just as God bids us work, God also commands us to observe Sabbath. For me, that means practicing the disciplines of silence, focused prayer and journaling. The paradox is that these practices are immediately life-giving to me. Why then are they so easy to shove aside when things get busy? May God grant all of us grace to find silence, rest and un-busyness in our lives.

Regina is associate pastor of Lee Heights Community Church in Cleveland, Ohio. She is a member of the MCC U.S. Committee on Women's Concerns.

"I am overwhelmed and depressed, unable to go on with life. I drop out of everything and focus on getting better."

"I am becoming way too busy again, and I ask my friend Janet to help me be accountable for my involvements. We come up with a plan where I will not take on any new activities without talking to her about it first."

by Anne Findlay-Chamberlain

Pioneer women

One of the most frequently discussed topics at meetings with the U.S. Committee on Women's Concerns (CWC) has been how we manage the multiple tasks and responsibilities that we have as women. Sharing times are packed full of stories about struggling to find balance (or perhaps more accurately sanity) with our various roles as women—church involvements, marriage, parenting, older parents, work, friendships, community interactions, graduate work, health and physical concerns. I have rejoiced, grieved, been challenged and reveled in such discussions for I am as over-extended as my peers and (mostly) loving every minute of it.

Scene One—1971

The roots of my multiple involvements go deep into my childhood. I am selected by my high school classmates for the dubious honor of being "Most Versatile" in my senior class. I pose for the yearbook picture with a basketball, a field hockey stick, a trumpet, a choir robe, school books, my boyfriend and a student council notebook. I obviously have a "too much to do and not enough time to do it" problem.

Scene Two—1977

After college I play field hockey in a league for women who want to play for recreation. One day I travel an hour south to play a team from Franklin County, Pa. My two-month-old son is nestled in a car seat on the sideline, oblivious to the hot competition while waiting for half-time and his chance to breast feed. The goal I score is lauded, but my half-time exhibition receives mixed reviews.

Scene Three—1988

I am overwhelmed and depressed, unable to go on with life. I drop out of everything and focus on getting better.

Scene Four—1992

I am becoming way too busy again, and I ask my friend Janet to help me be accountable for my involvements. We come up with a plan where I will not take on any new activities without talking to her about it first.

Scene Five—1995

I am in Kansas City, Missouri, for a CWC meeting. Having never been here before, Tina Mast Burnett and I decide to see the sights before the start of the meeting. I see an advertisement for the famous "Pioneer Women" statue which I think I remember from a school history text. We set out on foot to search for it. After about an hour of walking, we stand in front of the statue—a different one than I remember from my history text.



Women in ministry

Dawn Yoder Harms was ordained September 19 at Akron Mennonite Church, Akron, Pa.

Heather Bean has begun a pastorate at Peace Mennonite Fellowship, Fontana, Calif.

Susan Allison-Jones is half-time associate pastor at Breslau Mennonite Church, Breslau, Ont.

Rachel and Ivan Friesen began a pastorate July 11 at Hutterthal Mennonite Church, Freeman, S.D.

Jane Hooper Peifer was commissioned September 12 as pastor of Blossom Hill Mennonite Church, Lancaster, Pa.

In July, **Donna Jean Forster** began as assistant pastor with emphasis on youth ministries at St. Catharines United Mennonite Church, St. Catharines, Ont.

Gwen Groff was licensed as pastor of Bethany Mennonite Church, Bridgewater Corners Vt., on September 19.

Jennifer and David Searls began a pastorate at Zion Mennonite Church, Hubbard, Ore.

The statue before us features two women on horseback (sitting side-saddle, no less!) with two rugged-looking men carrying rifles and walking alongside the women while holding the reins. The statue I remember has two women standing alone with several children at their skirts, the wind blowing gently through their hair and clothes while they look with strength into the future. I am disappointed but revived when we decide we are the pioneer women of that day—two women in a strange place embarking on a journey together.

Scene Six—1997

I am in Fresno, California, for another CWC meeting. Gwen Groff and I have traveled all day, and this is her first time away from her infant daughter. Much of our talk revolves around parenting and separation. Gwen, who is breast feeding, has carried along the necessary pumping equipment. It occurs to Gwen that it is wasteful to throw out the expressed milk, and we go on a quest to find a cooler so she can preserve the precious cargo until we go home. We hunt through the local grocery store for the ice chest when she remembers that she also needs more baggy ties. It is impossible to find twist ties sold by themselves, especially at 9 p.m. I decide to take matters into my own hands and secure a collection of ties from the produce section of the store. I hope I am following in the footsteps of the Israelite midwives in Egypt and not rationalizing shoplifting.

Scene Seven—1999

I am busy, too busy, again. I think about making another pact of accountability with Janet. I will start seminary in the fall. I work as a counselor, helping to lead the senior high youth group at church. I study biblical Greek as a prerequisite for school, lead a Bible study at church, coach field hockey, try to maintain a healthy relationship with my husband of twenty-five years and make time for friendships, my garden and my house. In addition to all this, we have decided to invite a 13-year-old nephew to live with us for the next year to attend a local independent school.

Postscript

I've spent a lot of time in the past few months evaluating my life and schedule. Over the years I've had different reasons for being so busy. As a young adult, I think I was trying to prove my worth—to myself and to a not-so-gracious God. For a time after that, I kept busy to avoid the angst I felt deep within myself. Then as my children got into their busy years, I had my hands full keeping up with them and their activities.

Quite frankly if I did it over again, I would not miss a single quarter of the soccer games, a single note of the musicals or any one of the informal late-night talks when I needed sleep. For a time after my children left home, I tried to replace the empty nest with much to do (about nothing?). But I have entered a new phase of life, one where I hear the clock ticking.

Mid-life has found me thinking about the future, and the legacy I will someday leave behind. I also want to make the most of my life right now—the quality of relationships, the pleasure of fun and the bliss of joy-driven service. I am also more exquisitely aware of the miracle of each moment, and my body reminds me in often painful ways when I'm not taking care of myself. I want to look back at these years, knowing that I have lived life to the fullest.

In many ways, the pioneer women of my remembered statue and all of us busy women have much in common. We often have important people at our feet who need our attention. We need the community of other women to share our journey, scanning the horizon, wind blowing through our hair, always hopeful about the future while firmly planted in the present.

Anne lives in Oconomowoc, Wis. She attends New Vision Brethren in Christ Church in Waukesha, Wis. She served on the MCC U.S. Committee on Women's Concerns from 1992–99, chairing the committee from 1996–99.

"Teaching was the constant, the familiar, the unchanged terrain. New motherhood was improvisational, exhausting, uncharted territory that I wasn't sure I would ever be any good at. So I juggled."

by Beth Graybill

Keeping the balls in the air

It is Thursday, March 19, 1998. I have been home from the hospital just three days after a C-section delivery of my firstborn child. One week ago I was in hard labor. Now I am in the classroom of the college course I am teaching on women's issues. Just before I convened today's class, I found a discreet corner in the faculty lounge to breast feed my newborn son while my husband waited to provide childcare so I could teach.

As a part-time instructor, I work on a semester-by-semester contract and feel enough financial need to continue teaching, though it has meant scheduling four weeks of guest lectures or films around my expected due date. Having introduced today's scheduled speakers, I am listening to their discussion of "the time bind" women face, based on a book of that title by Arlie Russell Hochschild. (*The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 1997.)



Being here at all among appearance-conscious, slightly-bored undergraduates feels surreal. I am much more in touch with my newborn's three-hour nursing-sleeping schedule, but the issue of the "time bind" will become incredibly relevant in the upcoming 18 months.

Hochschild's book follows women and men in a specific corporate setting as they juggle work and parenting. Women interviewed in her book feel tremendous pressure to be good mothers, arranging childcare as well as running the household and maintaining their careers. In this company—rare for its family-friendly policies—few employees choose to prioritize parenting because it feels so much harder and less rewarding than their jobs.

In my case, the twice weekly 70-minutes that I spent in the classroom were a welcome break from full-time motherhood. Teaching was the constant, the familiar, the unchanged terrain. New motherhood was improvisational, exhausting, uncharted territory that I wasn't sure I would ever be any good at. So I juggled.

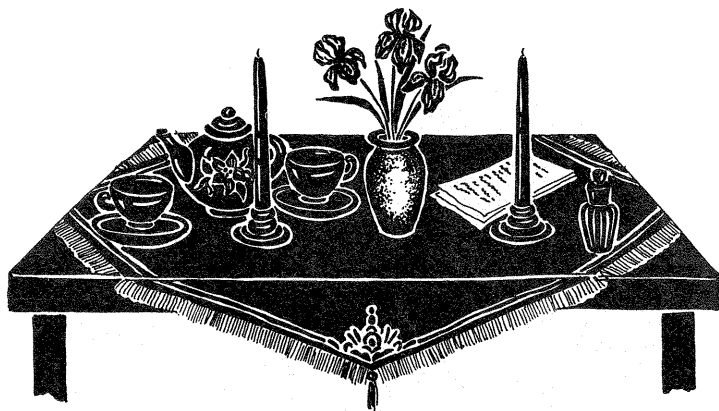
Juggling, of course, implies that one is keeping all the balls in the air. Those first weeks of teaching after my son's birth—the last seven of the semester—I could not bring myself to sit down and grade student assignments. Psychologically, I think, student reflections on dating or dieting just felt too distant from my reality. That semester I earned the lowest student evaluations in five years of teaching.

One thing I am still learning a year and a half later is that the fewer balls one has in the air, the easier the juggling. The pull is always to do more, but I feel better when I do less. Juggling is also easier the more hands are involved. One involved husband and two active grandmothers who share childcare make some of my other commitments possible.

So I continue to love my son and to juggle his care with work that nourishes my spirit in other ways. I look forward to my new job as Women's Concerns director, hoping this helps make the juggling easier.

Beth is the new director of MCC U.S. Women's Concerns. She is working to complete a Ph.D. in American studies with a concentration in women's studies.

The Fourth International Wesleyan/Holiness Women's Clergy Conference will be held at Ramada Inn Conference Center in Jacksonville, Florida, from April 27-30, 2000. For a registration form, contact Janet Peifer at 717-241-2514 or <revjmp@messiahvillage.com> or visit the website at <www.messiah.edu/WHWC>.



by Louise Stoltzfus

A sacred space

I have a problem. I don't know how to say no. I realized how out-of-control I was about two years ago when the president of a local credit union asked me to serve on an advisory committee. Although I have no financial expertise beyond the limited requirements of my personal accounts, I said yes.

As those who suffer from this malady know all too well, I do lots of fast revision to keep myself from spinning off the edge. Sometimes, as with the credit union, I simply admit my limitations and reverse an earlier yes. It isn't easy, but it is essential to sane living.

Beyond the rare success with the word no, I try to follow one basic principle in my personal search for quiet places. My home shall be a sacred space—a place for books and music, companions and friends, paintings and plants, rest and solitude.

Because this is the place where I go to recover, to get perspective, to feel utterly good about myself, I am thoughtful about who enters its doors. I choose to live alone. I keep my home warm in winter and as cool as possible in summer. I do not obsess about dust mites and water spots, but I pick up clothes and newspapers, at least before I receive guests. My home is a haven of rest, a peaceful place I am glad to share with those I love.

Louise is the new editor of *Women's Concerns Report*. She lives in Lancaster, Pa. and works full-time as a writer and editor.

Incorporating the theme, "Healing Arts: Peaceful Mind and Body," the fifth Mennonite Arts Weekend will be held February 4-6, 2000 in Cincinnati, Ohio. Participants are Mary Mitchell Trejo, sculptor; Marilyn Houser-Hamm, musician; David Wright, poet; Barbara Fast, paper artist; Barbra Graber, theater artist; Shirley Shenk, quilt designer; Gene Wiggins, storyteller; Ted and Lee, comedic actors; Esther Augsburg, sculptor; Diane Mankin, art exhibit curator; and J. Harold Moyer, composer. *The Living Mirror*, edited by Cara Hummel, will spotlight young Mennonite writers. For registration information, contact Hal Hess or Christine Schumacher at 513-351-8785 or <schess@cinci.infi.net>.

New books

Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Waterloo, Ontario, has published *Obedience, Suspicion and the Gospel of Mark: A Mennonite-Feminist Exploration of Biblical Authority* by Lydia Neufeld Harder. From the vantage point of a scholar, feminist and member of the faith community, Harder explores various questions. How do our social, political and religious commitments influence our interpretation of biblical texts? Are obedience and suspicion necessarily opposite ways to respond to the authority of the Bible? Can one criticize and be transformed at the same time? To order, call 519-884-0710, ext. 6124 or email <press@wlu.ca>.

She Has Done a Good Thing: Mennonite Women Leaders Tell Their Stories (Herald Press, 1999), edited by Mary Swartley and Rhoda Keener, gathers the dramatic stories of Mennonite women leaders across the denomination. This inspiring book speaks to issues of denominational change and struggle, as well as the interrelations of women, men and faith. Available wherever Herald Press books are sold. To order directly from publisher, call 1-800-759-4447. \$14.99 US/ \$22.29 Cdn.

Quiet Shouts: Stories of Lancaster Mennonite Women Leaders (Herald Press, 1999) by Louise Stoltzfus tells the moving stories of 20th century Lancaster (Pa.) Mennonite Conference women who sought to express and share church leadership gifts in a profoundly conservative religious climate. "Give this book to some young woman with stars in her eyes," writes Shirley Hershey Showalter, president of Goshen College. Available wherever Herald Press books are sold. To order directly from publisher, call 1-800-759-4447. \$12.99 US/ \$19.29 Cdn.

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WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committees on Women's Concerns. We believe that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committees strive to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures through which women and men can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in REPORT do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committees on Women's Concerns.

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT is edited by Louise Stoltzfus. Layout by Beth Oberholtzer Design.

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Making Peace with Conflict: Practical Skills for Conflict Transformation (Herald Press, 1999), edited by Carolyn Schrock-Shenk and Lawrence Ressler, presents theologically practical ways to understand and transform conflict. Does conflict surprise and overwhelm you? Do you wish you were more able to transform problems into opportunities? Do you wonder what power has to do with conflict? Here is a practical guide based on biblical and Anabaptist principles. Women contributors include Carolyn Schrock-Shenk, Regina Shands Stoltzfus, Kori Leaman Miller, Valerie Weaver-Zercher, Ann Shenk Wenger, Iris de León-Hartshorn, Elaine Enns and Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz. A project of Mennonite Conciliation Service, the book is available from MCC or wherever Herald Press books are sold. To order directly from the publisher, call 1-800-759-4447. \$14.99 US/ \$22.29 Cdn.

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